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MIDDLE EAST - AFRICA - SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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Spanish Sahara

Saharan National Union Party Reorganizes and Shifts Gears

The Spanish-backed Saharan National Union Party (PUNS), one of the two main political parties in the Spanish Sahara, has reorganized itself and announced that it favors "total independence" for the region. At a party congress in El Aaiun last week, the party elected a new secretary general and resolved to re-examine its relations with Spain and to make overtures to the region's second political party, the Front for the Liberation of Saguia El Hamra and Rio de Oro (FPOLISARIO).

PUNS is made up of younger Saharans who, in the eyes of Madrid, would form the nucleus of a possible independent Sahara government with close ties to Spain. In May of this year, however, the party's secretary general, Ould Rachid, defected to Rabat, claiming the disputed region belonged solely to Morocco. The party floundered in the wake of Rachid's move and took a back seat to the activities of the FPOLISARIO, which is backed by Algeria.

FPOLISARIO has been militantly nationalist in espousing self-determination and independence, and as a result has not been accepted by Spain as a legal Saharan party. FPOLISARIO is well organized; it staged impressive demonstrations during the visit last May of a UN fact finding commission. The party maintains that it is the true representative of the Saharan people, and requested the commission to present its position to the International Court of Justice.

Spain has tolerated subsequent demonstrations by FPOLISARIO with the hope of keeping the party overt and possibly establishing some form of dialogue between it and the PUNS. Madrid probably views such a dialogue as strengthening the case for handing the territory over to an indigenous political entity and as a means of thwarting the drive of Morocco and Mauritania to gain support for partitioning the territory.

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The Moroccan press has denounced Spain's apparent efforts to create a link between the two parties, charging collusion between Spain and FPOLISARIO. These charges result from Spain's appointment of a Saharan with suspected FPOLISARIO ties to the post of deputy secretary general of the territory--the highest position ever for a Saharan in the Spanish administration. The Moroccans have also been upset by a comment by the new leader of PUNS, Suhe Sidna, that his group, "like the FPOLISARIO, is ready to fight for independence." The Moroccan press has charged that these latest developments are of "unparalleled gravity." (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Kenya

Kenyatta Foe Wins By-Election

Mark Mwithaga, a long time backbench critic of the Kenyatta government, was reelected by a comfortable margin to his old parliamentary seat on August 16. He had been deprived of his seat in June by the high court for alleged election abuses. On the same day he was reelected, he was sentenced by a lower court to three and a half years imprisonment on an assault charge.

Mwithaga was an active member of the committee which investigated the murder of J. M. Kariuki. Mwithaga, like Kariuki, is from the northern branch of the Kikuyu tribe, which is opposed to Kenyatta and his southern Kikuyu supporters.

Mwithaga's reelection in the face of strong government efforts to defeat and discredit him probably indicates that Kenyatta's recent intimidation of parliament and emphasis on a narrow appeal to southern Kikuyu interests are resented by Kenyans from other tribal factions.

When parliament reconvenes late next month, Mwithaga's treatment by the government could serve to rally the backbenchers against Kenyatta, especially if the appeals court sustains his sentence on the assault charge. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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Oman

Popular Front Discusses Dhofar Fighting

In an unusual move, the radio of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman (PFLO) last week criticized Arab governments for their failure to speak out against Iran's active role in the fighting in Dhofar province. The Aden-based "Voice of Oman" also was critical of "attempts by certain submissive Arab regimes" to keep Sultan Qabus in power.

Normally, PFLO propaganda reserves its barbs for Iran, Jordan, and the UK, with an occasional reference to the US. The leftist Front's contention that the entire Arab nation must bear responsibility for events in Oman contains a hint of desperation and suggests that the PFLO may believe that Arab supporters of the guerrilla war are having second thoughts. One broadcast admitted that the revolution's existence is dependent on support from antiimperialist Arab regimes and progressive Arab forces. PFLO, aware of South Yemeni representatives' recent talks with the Saudis, may be worried about the durability of Aden's support for the rebellion.

The reference to "submissive Arab regimes" might have been directed at Baghdad, which according to several recent reports intends to enter into diplomatic relations with Muscat in the near future. PFLO is also reported concerned about the reliability of Iraqi aid which has, [REDACTED] diminished in recent months.

Although PFLO commentators admitted the gravity of their military situation, the broadcasts of last week carried no hint that the Front intends to pull out of Dhofar or to otherwise change tactics. In fact, the broadcasts claimed that PFLO had no intention of bargaining or of laying down its arms as long as foreign troops are in Oman. With a show of bravado, PFLO said "we are quite capable of keeping the fighting alive and taking it forward toward eventual victory." (SECRET/NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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